



We are Many. We are Different. We Create Life.

The Forum, 1.1 (March 2022)

The Religion and Global Health Forum 2nd Anniversary “Letter from the Director”

Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? (Jeremiah 8:22, NRV5)

Greetings from the Religion and Global Health Forum at Drew Theological School. I am extremely delighted to share with you this initial letter about the work of the *Forum*. It has been a great joy to provide a platform to build a world where people of all socio-economic, racial, religious, gendered, geographical, cultural, abled and disabled backgrounds and bodies, especially the historically marginalized, have access to consistent, quality healthcare and dignity.

Since the launch of the Forum in 2020, we’ve embarked on establishing the principles, strategic partnerships, and commitments to ensure that we attain the goals of the *Forum*. In some ways, the *Forum* is a COVID baby. We came out of the proverbial womb into a world ravaged and shut down by COVID-19: Everyone, or most everyone, went home and some went online. There was masking, social distancing, businesses and churches closed and new ones started. New modes of learning were developed and old ones were refined. There was economic hardship and social unrest. The killings of George Floyd forced us to publicly articulate the inability or marginalized persons and communities to breath (“I Can’t Breathe.”). But we learned to breathe differently, almost defiantly insisting that we will never stop breathing. The killing of Breonna Taylor forced us to wonder and react, again, to the invasive social and political virus of racial discrimination and racialized violence.

This means that at the Forum, we have learned to see and experience the world through the lens and impact of multiple pandemics: We insist on connecting discussions about the etiology of disease to that of social dis-ease, as the world community struggled with health inequities around the production and differently incentivized distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine; We wondered what it means to officially consider whether being Black is bad for one’s health, as the American Medical Association declared racism a threat

to public health; We examined the importance and impact (including negative impact) of religious and cultural beliefs on individual and community health decision-making; We discussed interdisciplinary approaches to resilience as mental health deteriorated, and micro- and macro-aggressions and assaults increased in schools, work and public places; We witnessed the violent manifestation of toxic singularity in the form of ethno-nationalisms, insurrections, and coup d'états on the global body; etc.

All the while, we have benefitted from researchers, medical professionals, theologians, scholars, pastors, activists, artists, and students who have shown a renewed commitment to working for health equity and health justice. We have formed an exciting partnership with the Global Health Catalyst (hosted at Harvard and Johns Hopkins), launched a new cohort Doctor of Ministry program on Faith Health and Social Equity at Drew Theological School, and received new support from the Interfaith Youth Core organization (IFYC).

As we begin the third year, we recognize that have witnessed and encountered death – human death, social death. But we have also focused on creative ways to build equity, to build resilience, spirituality and praxis that is strong enough to build lasting communities with shared ethos, and nimble enough to address unique circumstances. We are excited about our new initiative called “Healthy Churches Now.” It aims to bring the best of science (specifically tele-medicine) and the best of religion together to expand and enhance the role of churches and religious organizations as potential and actual “health hubs.” We believe that theological institutions, in partnership with medical, health research institutions, can become even more active and involved in improving the wholistic health outcomes of the community – where people live, work, worship, study and play. This work will improve health literacy, disease prevention, healthy lifestyles, community and peer mentoring that is scientifically solid and culturally credible.

Here at Drew Theological School, we are committed to four important shared values: Antiracism work; Ecological sustainability and justice; gender and sexual justice and equity; and interfaith dialogues. As we begin another year of work at the Forum, we want to invite you to stay with us on this journey and invite others to join us. We appreciate your involvement and your feedback. We also invite you to consider writing pieces for publication on our site.

We wish you a health and happy year ahead.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
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